

Message Text

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PAGE 01 VIENTI 00340 140904Z
ACTION EA-12

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CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 0340

BANGKOK ALSO PASS UDORN ELECTRICALLY

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EAGR EAID PEPR PDEV SOCI LA US

SUBJECT: RICE SHORTAGE CONDITIONS IN SOUTHERN LAOS

REF: A VIENTIANE 0324, B STATE 054576

SUMMARY: THREE SEPARATE WESTERN SOURCES WHO WERE RECENTLY IN SAVANNAKHET SAID THAT THE RICE SHORTAGE THERE WAS SEVERE. TWO OF THE SOURCES REPORTED ON THE RICE AID DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM, LOCAL STORAGE CAPACITIES, AND EFFORTS MADE BY LOCAL PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES TO SOLVE THE SHORTAGE PROBLEMS. A LAO SOURCE FROM PAKSE REPORTED THAT THERE WERE SUFFICIENT RICE STOCKS THERE. THE INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THESE FOUR SOURCES SUPPLEMENTS THE EMBASSY'S RESPONSE, REF A, TO THE QUESTIONS ON THE FOOD SHORTAGE CONDITIONS IN SOUTHERN LAOS POSED
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IN REF B.

1. A DUTCH AGRONOMIST WHO HAD JUST RETURNED FROM SAVANNAKHET TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER MARCH 11 THAT HE HAD BEEN SENT THERE BY HIS GOVERNMENT TO MAKE A STUDY OF THE LOCAL RICE SHORTAGE, DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM, AND STORAGE CAPACITY. HE SAID THAT THE RICE SHOTAGE

THROUGHOUT SAVANNAKHET PROVINCE WAS INDEED DIRE AND THAT THE RICE STOCKS FROM THE NOVEMBER 1977 HARVEST WOULD BE TOTALLY DEPLETED BY MAY 1978. HE SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD STARTED TO DISTRIBUTE SOME OF THE INCOMING DUTCH AND WORLD FOOD PROGRAM RICE AID TO THE REGIONS OF IMMEDIATE NEED IN KHAMMOUANE AND SAVANNAKHET PROVINCES.

2. A FRENCH WOMAN WHO STILL LIVES IN SAVANNAKHET (HER HUSBAND IS AN ENGINEER WORKING ON THE WATER WORKS PROJECT) TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER MARCH 11 THAT THE FOOD SHORTAGE IN SAVANNAKHET WAS SEVERE. SHE SAID THAT THE PEOPLE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE WERE NOW RUNNING OUT OF RICE HARVESTED IN NOVEMBER 1977 AND THAT THE DRY SEASON RICE HARVEST WOULD BE POOR. SHE SAID THAT THERE WAS NO BEEF OR BUFFALO SOLD IN THE SAVANNAKHET FREE MARKET AND ONLY A LITTLE PORK. A WESTERN BUSINESSMAN WHO TRAVELED TO SAVANNAKHET IN MARCH AS THE SWEDISH AID (SIDA) AGENT ALSO SAID THAT THERE WAS A SERIOUS RICE SHORTAGE.

3. A LAO STUDENT TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER MARCH 12 THAT HIS BROTHER HAD COME TO VIENTIANE FROM PAKSE ON MARCH 10 AND REPORTED THAT THERE WAS SUFFICIENT RICE IN CHAMPASSAK PROVINCE. HE SAID THAT THE PEOPLE THERE BELIEVED THAT THEY HAD ENOUGH RICE TO LAST UNTIL THE NEXT HARVEST IN OCTOBER 1978 IF THE GOVERNMENT WOULD
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NOT TRUCK CHAMPASSAK RICE STOCKS TO DEFICIT AREAS IN ADJOINING PROVINCES. HE SAID THAT MEAT, FISH AND EGGS WERE PLENTIFUL. HE ADDED THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD ANGERED THE POPULATION IN MID-FEBRUARY WHEN IT BOUGHT OVER 100 SWINE AT A PRICE THAT WAS LOWER THAN PRODUCTION COST AND AIRLIFTED THE PORK TO THE VIETNAMESE MILITARY CAMP ON KHONG ISLAND.

4. THE DUTCH AND SWEDISH REPRESENTATIVES SAID THAT THE SOUTHERN PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR DISTRIBUTING RICE TO THE AREAS OF NEED WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE PROVINCES. SAVANNAKHET REPORTEDLY HAD SUFFICIENT TRUCKS AND A SERVICEABLE ROAD NETWORK FOR DISTRIBUTION. BOTH SOURCES, HOWEVER, WERE LESS SANGUINE THAT SARAVAN AND ATTOPEU PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES WOULD BE ABLE TO SUPPLY SUFFICIENT TRUCKS TO CARRY THE RICE AID STORED IN SAVANNAKHET TO THE AREAS OF NEED IN THEIR PROVINCES.

5. THE DUTCH REPRESENTATIVE SAID THAT THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN SAVANNAKHET WERE HELPFUL TO HIM AND DEDICATED TO SOLVING THE FOOD SHORTAGE PROBLEM. HE SAID

THAT THEY WERE MAKING CONTINUED EFFORTS TO COLLECT DDTA. HE ADDED THAT THE PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES INTENDED TO GIVE RICE TO THE POOREST FARMERS FREE OF CHARGE AND TO SELL IT FOR 35 KIP PER KILO TO PEOPLE WHO HAD MONEY BUT NO RICE.

6. THE DUTCH REPRESENTATIVE SAID THAT THE RICE STORAGE FACILITIES THAT HE INSPECTED IN SAVANNAKHET WERE GOOD AND THAT LOCAL AUTHORITIES HAD TAKEN PRECAUTIONS TO MINIMIZE WASTE. HE SAID THAT THE DUTCH AND WORLD FOOD PROGRAM RICE AID THAT HE SAW BEING IMPORTED DURING THE FIRST WEEK OF MARCH WAS STORED IN TWO LARGE WAREHOUSES AND THAT THERE WERE A MULTITUDE OF EMPTY HOUSES TO STORE MORE RICE.
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7. THE DUTCH REPRESENTATIVE CALCULATED THAT THE LAO WERE ABLE TO IMPORT ABOUT 360 TONS OF RICE DAILY USING TWO BARGES. HE SAID THAT ANOTHER TWO BARGES COULD BE RENTED FROM A THAI BUSINESSMAN RESIDENT IN MUKDAHAN IF NECESSARY. THE SIDA AGENT SAID THAT HE CALCULATED THAT ONLY 150 TO 250 TONS OF RICE COULD BE IMPORTED FROM THAILAND PER DAY AT SAVANNAKHET USING TWO BARGES. A UNDP OFFICIAL SAID THAT THEY HAD RECHECKED THEIR CALCULATIONS FOR RICE IMPORTATION RATES AT THE THANALENG FERRY CROSSING POINT IN VIENTIANE AND HAD READJUSTED THE FIGURE DOWNWARDS TO 450 TONS OF RICE PER DAY.
CHAMBERLIN

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